

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8623

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AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 19966

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: THE TORIES AND DEVOLUTION

REF: A. LONDON 19562 B. LONDON 19409

SUMMARY: DIVIDED CONSERVATIVE VIEWS ON DEVOLUTION HAVE
SURFACED IN PARTY'S RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION
BILL. CONSERVATIVES, ON THE HOOK FOR A LONG TIME IN
FAVOR OF DEVOLUTION FOR SCOTLAND BUT EQUALLY STRONG IN
OPPOSING SEPARATION, CAME THROUGH EXTENDED SHADOW CABINET
DEBATE IN FAVOR OF THREE-LINE WHIP OPPOSING GOVERNMENT
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BILL. THIS CALLED FORTH STRONG STATEMENT BY HEATH

(PRO-DEVOLUTION AND PRO-UNION) FOLLOWED BY RESIGNATIONS OF LEADING SCOTS FROM SHADOW CABINET. END SUMMARY.

1. FRAGILE FABRIC OF TORY PARTY UNITY HAS BEEN TORN BY GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION BILL. ONCE BILL WAS PRESENTED (REF B), TORY SHADOW CABINET HELD LONG AND, REPORTEDLY, ACRIMONIOUS DISCUSSION ON TORY TACTICS, RESULTING IN DECISION LAST WEEK THAT 1) CONSERVATIVES WOULD OPPOSE GOVERNMENT BILL AND 2) THREE-LINE WHIP WOULD BE IMPOSED.

2. THIS DECISION WAS CONTROVERSIAL IN THE SHADOW CABINET AND WITH CONSERVATIVE MPS OUTSIDE. THE SIXTEEN SCOTTISH TORIES ARE DIVIDED INTO PRO AND ANTI-DEVOLUTION CAMPS, BUT SOME ANTI'S NONETHELESS WISHED TO SUPPORT DISCUSSION OF DEVOLUTION BY PARLIAMENT AND DID NOT WANT TO VOTE AGAINST THE INTRODUCTION OF THE BILL. ONE CONSERVATIVE SCOT WHO REPRESENTS AN ENGLISH CONSTITUENCY TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER LAST WEEK THAT HE COULD NOT IN CONSCIENCE VOTE AGAINST INTRODUCTION OF THE BILL, BUT A NUMBER OF ENGLISH CONSERVATIVES WHO OPPOSE DEVOLUTION CAME OUT STRONGLY IN SUPPORT OF THE THREE-LINE WHIP. PERHAPS REFLECTIVE OF SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES POSED FOR CONSERVATIVES BY THE SHADOW CABINET'S DECISION, MRS. THATCHER SEEMED TO BE MOVING SOME DISTANCE TOWARD ALLOWING FOR CONSERVATIVES TO DEVIATE FROM THE THREE-LINE WHIP, ON GROUNDS OF "CONSCIENCE," IN A SPEECH SHE GAVE AT LIVERPOOL DECEMBER 2.

3. HER POSITION APPEARED TO HARDEN AFTER AND PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THE SPEECH FORMER LEADER HEATH GAVE ON DECEMBER 6 IN GLASGOW. HEATH INDICATED FIRMLY HE WOULD NOT BE BOUND TO VOTE AGAINST THE INTRODUCTION OF THE GOVERNMENT BILL, EVEN THOUGH HE FELT THE BILL WAS INADEQUATE. HE REAFFIRMED HIS OWN PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO DEVOLUTION FOR SCOTLAND AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THE UNION. REFERRING TO MRS. THATCHER'S COMMENT ON CONSCIENCE, HEATH APPEARED TO BE CALLING FOR OTHER CONSERVATIVES TO JOIN HIM IN DEFYING THE WHIP. SOME OF THE MORE CONSERVATIVE CONSERVATIVES IMMEDIATELY JOINED IN THE FRAY, ATTACKING HEATH'S "DISLOYALTY" TO THE

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LEADER AND URGING THOSE WHO COULD NOT SUPPORT THE WHIP TO RESIGN FROM SHADOW CABINET POSITIONS.

4. ANOTHER STAGE IN THE AFFAIR WAS REACHED DECEMBER 7 WHEN, AFTER PROLONGED AGONIZING, SHADOW SPOKESMAN ON SCOTLAND ALICK BUCHANAN-SMITH AND HIS DEPUTY (MALCOLM RIFKIND) RESIGNED FROM THE SHADOW CABINET OVER THE ISSUE, FOUR OTHER LEADING SCOT TORIES SUBMITTED RESIGNATIONS

FROM THEIR POSITIONS WHICH WERE NOT ACCEPTED (HECTOR MONRO, SPORT; JOHN CORRIE, DEPUTY WHIP; GEORGE YOUNGER, DEPUTY SPOKESMAN ON SCOTLAND; RUSSELL FAIRGRIEVE, CHAIRMAN OF SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE PARTY), AND MRS. THATCHER ISSUED ANOTHER STATEMENT REAFFIRMING THE PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO DEVOLUTION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE UNION, BUT CONTINUED OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT BILL. SHE REPLACED BUCHANAN-SMITH WITH TEDDY TAYLOR, WHOM ONLY

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RECENTLY SHE HAD MOVED OUT OF THE DEVOLUTION COCKPIT ONTO THE FRONT BENCH AS SPOKESMAN FOR TRADE.

5. COMMENT: ONCE AGAIN THE PROPENSITY OF THE CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP IN SHADOW CABINET TO CONCENTRATE ON TACTICS RATHER THAN POLICIES HAS LED PARTY INTO DIFFICULTIES. MRS. THATCHER, PERHAPS UNDER INSPIRATION OF HER EXECUTIVE OFFICER CAIREY NEAVE), REPORTEDLY HER DEPUTY (WILLIE WHITELAW), AND PERHAPS HER CHIEF WHIP
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(HUMPHREY ATKINS) HAS TRIED TO DRAW A FINE LINE BETWEEN TACTICAL OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT ACROSS THE BOARD AND A POLICY COMMITMENT; THE NET RESULT IS A FURTHER PUBLIC DISPLAY OF THE DISUNITY WITHIN THE PARTY ON DEVOLUTION PER SE, DISAFFECTIONS FROM THE SHADOW CABINET, AND A SERIOUS WEAKENING OF THE PARTY'S EFFORTS TO GENERATE ENTHUSIASM AND SUPPORT IN SCOTLAND.

6. THE PRESENT DIFFICULTY ALSO CONFIRMS CRITICISMS OF MRS. THATCHER'S LEADERSHIP WHICH WERE MADE AT THE TIME OF HER LATEST SHADOW CABINET RESHUFFLE (REF A), THAT SHE WAS MOVING THE PARTY PERCEPTIBLY TO THE RIGHT AND NARROWING THE BASE OF THE PARTY'S APPEAL. THIS CRITICISM HAS BEEN LEVIED BOTH BY THE HEAD OF THE TORY REFORM GROUP IN A PUBLIC COMMENT DECEMBER 7 AND EARLIER IN A CONSERVATIVE MP'S COMMENT TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER. THE TORIES NOW APPEAR TO BE THE VOICE OF THE ENGLISH BACKLASH ON DEVOLUTION, INCREASINGLY RIGID IN OPPOSING DEVOLUTION.

7. THE STORY ISN'T OVER EITHER. BY GIVING THE SPOKESMAN ROLE TO TEDDY TAYLOR, MRS. THATCHER IS CREATING ANOTHER CONSCIENCE PROBLEM. TAYLOR HAS BEEN AN OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF DEVOLUTION IN ALMOST ANY WAY, SHAPE, OR FORM; MRS. THATCHER NOW GIVES HIM THE MAIN JOB OF LEADING THE CONSERVATIVES IN OPPOSING THE DEVOLUTION BILL (WHICH HE WILL BE EAGER TO DO), WHILE AT THE SAME TIME TRYING TO MAINTAIN THE PARTY'S LONG-STANDING COMMITMENT TO DEVOLUTION (WHICH WILL REQUIRE HIM TO BACK OFF FROM HIS VOCIFEROUSLY-EXPRESSED VIEWS). MOVING TAYLOR INTO THE SCOTTISH AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO ADDS TO THE IMPRESSION THAT MRS. THATCHER IS MOVING AWAY FROM THE COMMITMENT TO THE PRINCIPLE OF DEVOLUTION.

8. THE DISARRAY ON THE TORY SIDE PRESAGES PERHAPS SOME EASING OF THE GOVERNMENT'S DILEMMA ON NEXT WEEK'S VOTE ON THE DEVOLUTION BILL. THE MATHEMATICS OF ALL THIS IS NOT YET CLEAR EITHER ON THE TORY OR THE LABOR

BENCHES, WHERE SOME EIGHTY SIGNATURES HAVE BEEN IN-
SCRIBED ON AN EARLY-DAY MOTION CALLING FOR A DEVOLUTION
REFERENDUM. INCREASINGLY A REFERENDUM AT SOME TIME IN
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THE PROCESS APPEARS TO OFFER SOME HOPE OF RESOLVING
HMG'S DIFFICULTIES. WHAT SOME CONSERVATIVE MPS HAVE
WANTED (WHICH DOESN'T SEEM TO BE IN THE CARDS YET) IS A
FREE VOTE ON DEVOLUTION, AND THE CONSERVATIVES SEEM TO
HAVE LOST AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CREATING DIFFICULTIES FOR
THE GOVERNMENT BY DECIDING ON A THREE-LINE WHIP RATHER
THAN A FREE VOTE.

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